

1927 - 1937

By 1937, in 30 short years, with creativity, determination, hard work and great foresight, the women who first began the work of the Minnesota State Board of Examiners of Nurses and those who followed had established a dynamic organization. During the decade 1927-1937 members became more confident of their mission. They greatly increased the number of school and hospital visits and, in the interests of thorough education and patient safety, became much more directive and straightforward in their comments and recommendations. The interesting matter of the West Side General Hospital School of Nursing in St. Paul is a good demonstration.

In May 1928 Mrs. Sophie Hein and Miss Leila Halverson paid a visit to the West Side General Hospital School of Nursing, which had a history of troubles dating to 1921. They made a series of 14 recommendations, to be met by September 1 of that year or “that the school of nursing be discontinued.” Among their requirements:

- that text books be owned by students
- that services in the hospital be segregated
- that clerical help be provided in the office: and
- “Since the school of nursing is more or less in a state of disorganization the Board recommends that you secure a superintendent of nurses with greater experience, for the re-organization of the school, and, that under no conditions should the superintendent of nurses be expected to act as anesthetist.”

In July the Reverend Baitinger (there is no record of his first name), a director of the hospital, attended the Board meeting and requested a postponement of the September 1 deadline. The Board declined. Reverend Baitinger announced he would call a meeting of his Board of Directors for discussion and a decision on the matter. In August he notified the Board the West Side General Hospital would continue its school and had hired an experienced Superintendent of Nurses.

In September the Board decided to visit the West Side General Hospital shortly and “if the conditions set forth by the board have not been met, that the school be discontinued.”

Mrs. Hein and Miss Halverson visited and determined that the requirements had not been met. It was decided that another visit be held before the November Board meeting. On November 23, Miss Halverson visited the school and found much, though not total, improvement.

But by June 1929 the school was in trouble again. “Mrs. Hein and Miss Halverson reported visit to the hospital, upon which date there was no Superintendent of Nurses, and no instructor, the Superintendent of Nurses having been asked to resign. She did so a few days later. Secretary reported conference at the office with Reverend Baitinger, Miss Bremer, Superintendent of Nurses, and Reverend Grannke, who has a daughter in the school of nursing. Reverend Baitinger called at the office during a meeting of the Board. Motion made by Ms. Newcombe ‘that the West Side General Hospital School of Nursing be stricken from the accredited list of schools of nursing in Minnesota because of the

present state of disorganization still existing after the long struggle in an attempt to bring the school up to the required standards.' Motion carried." The Minnesota State Board of Examiners of Nurses offered to help outplace the school's students.

On July 12, 1929, Mrs. Hein reported on a conference she had had with the hospital's board of directors and its medical staff committee, relative to the discontinuation of the school, which had secured a new Superintendent of Nurses. "The Board made a thorough study and analysis of the hospital and school of nursing and after a very careful reconsideration voted not to rescind its former action of June 27, 1929, relative to the discontinuation of accrediting the school. Motion by Sister Domitilla, 'that an abstract of the history of the school of nursing, as found in the records at this office, be sent to the Board of Directors at the West Side General Hospital, also to the Chief of Staff, accompanied by a letter from the Board, stating that under present conditions, the Board cannot rescind its former action of June 27, 1929, relative the West Side General Hospital School of Nursing.' Motion carried. Secretary instructed to state, also, the following: 'This Board feels that you will no doubt realize, after a careful study of the past history of the hospital and School of Nursing, that the Board has been lenient over a long period of time. The essential thing is to have a competent person at the head of the school of nursing, who realizes the needs, and who knows how to meet them, as the Board feels it is useless to discuss the required standards of an accredited school of nursing, unless there is an adequate and suitable organization to establish and maintain the same.'

EDUCATING NURSES

The late 1920s saw many nursing students from around the state travel to Minneapolis to study. This caused some difficulty for the schools which accepted these students from their rural affiliates and the Minnesota State Board of Examiners of Nurses was often called upon to help solve problems. Among them was a case in January 1927. The Board had been asked to investigate the death of a nursing student from Ortonville, a small town in outstate Minnesota, who had been studying at a Minneapolis school of nursing. It appears that her parents were satisfied with the care given her; a doctor was not. In her report to the board, Mary Gladwin noted some of the difficulties faced by the school: "The school has not been particularly fortunate with the affiliates as the files show...the young woman who died stayed out all night just a few nights before she died. She was seen entering her quarters at seven in the morning.....A good deal of the talk about the schools is, no doubt, due to a very natural attempt at self-defense on the part of the affiliates. The office files contain a long list of disgraceful things relating to some of the small school students."

"For example: a Warren student dies at the University Hospital from a self-produced abortion; another was returned to her own school on account of drunkenness; two students have lately been returned to Crookston because of immorality; a Montevideo student ran away with a young man who was on parole from St. Cloud, and who, as she knew, was treated at the University for a venereal disease; another one suspected of having a venereal disease confessed to improper relations with a man friend; a Stillwater student was sent home for drunkenness; a St. Andrew's pupil had to stop her work for the

birth of a child; and a Rochester pupil was sent back with acute syphilis and acute gonorrhea.”

“The School was in no way responsible for any of these things and there is proof that the traits displayed were acquired, and the misfortunes happened, before the pupils came to the city.”

“If young women can not be trusted and have not been prepared for the life which confronts them as affiliates in a big city, they can not be trusted in the intimate unsupervised life with patients after they are graduated.”

Mary Gladwin, the Educational Director who wrote the above report, also inspected new schools of nursing. In an April 1927 report on a visit to a school in Pipestone she observed a serious administrative oversight. After making many suggestions for improvement and telling the hospital president and trustees that the Minnesota State Board of Nursing Examiners would likely not grant accreditation she noted: “The gentlemen in question are much in earnest and will make an effort to find something better. They confessed that in building the hospital they had thought only of the patients and had not remembered that there must be nurses.”

Noting an increase in the number of applicants for registration from foreign countries, the Board, in an attempt to be certain the graduates of nursing schools in Europe and other countries, were well-prepared, tried to research the nursing laws of other nations. The International Council of Nurses could not provide a comprehensive summary, but did agree to review applications from foreign countries if assistance was found to be necessary in determining the applicants’ eligibility for examination and registration.

Four students made the 1927 exam honor roll, each scoring 92 percent. They were:

- Alvina Sunde, Northwestern Hospital, Minneapolis
- Dorothy May Sheldon, St. Luke’s Hospital, St. Paul
- Edna E. Peterson, St. Mary’s, Rochester
- Ella A. Haugum, St. Paul Hospital, St. Paul

Always concerned with adequacy of education and the number of failures in the examination, the Board set forth a list of recommendations for training schools:

- “That each school have a training committee consisting of a member of the Board of Directors, a member of the medical staff, a woman interested in civic affairs, the superintendent of the hospital and the superintendent of nurses.”
- “Pupils to own their own textbooks. Where these are loaned by the school the pupils often graduate and go forth to their work without a single book on nursing.”
- “The practice of pupils providing their own thermometers to be discontinued. It does not tend to nice care of those instruments and is bad teaching.”
- “All morphia to be kept under lock and key in charge of a responsible person, who gives it out as needed.”

- “No applicant under 18 is to be received in any school. Such an individual is not mature enough in either body or mind, to undertake the required work....
- “Although the law allows pupils to enter schools of nursing after the completion of eighth grade in the public schools, the institutions to which many pupils must go for the third year, find it impossible to receive pupils of such limited education.” Though not strictly in compliance with statute the Board’s recommendation was emphatic: “Pupils who enter schools of nursing after November, 1928 must have had at least one year of High School work in order to enter any of the schools which, in this state, offer affiliation.”

There is a long list of other recommendations on matters such as records, night duty, probation, vacation, sick leave and even the arrangement of the students’ bathroom.

Having first attempted, and failed, to change the educational requirements for entering nursing students in 1919, the Board was successful in obtaining the necessary legislation in 1929. The new requirements were one year of high school as of September 1929 and two years of high school as of September 1935.

By 1930 the Board had accredited 53 schools of nursing statewide and had revised its Curriculum and Requirements for Accredited Schools of Nursing, first in adopted in 1910, five times – in 1917, 1919, 1924, 1927 and 1929.

In October of 1928 a Duluth School of Nursing “requested the Board’s advice relative to the admission of a male student for the remainder of his course of nursing, having had one year’s training at the Alexian Brothers Hospital, in Chicago. Secretary was instructed to write that, though there is nothing to prevent her from consideration for completion of his course, that the Board does not advise that he be admitted because of the many difficulties that she will have to meet, regarding class work, assignments to the various services, housing, etc. Also that the Board feels it is wiser to refer him to some accredited school of nursing that regularly admits male students, as St. Elizabeth Hospital, Chicago, and the Hinsdale Sanatorium, Hinsdale, Illinois, as well as some in Wisconsin.”

But the issue with male nurses would not go away and in March of 1931, the Board made an important decision: “Secretary reported application for examination from two male nurses, both of whom were found eligible for examination. Motion by Mrs. Hein that an addition be made to the ‘Rules Governing the Examination and Registration of Nurses,’ to apply to male nurses as follows: ‘that male applicants be exempt from writing the examination in Obstetrics and Pediatrics, and that they be required to write an examination in Genito-Urinary Diseases instead.’ Motion carried. Secy. instructed to prepare a set of questions in G-U Diseases for May 1931 State Board Examination.”

Also in 1928, Mr. Norley, Superintendent of Fairview Hospital, Minneapolis, asked if there weren’t possible advantages to be gained by the Minnesota Schools of Nursing granting credit in time to students with degrees from accredited colleges and universities. The Attorney General opined that the law did not permit this interpretation.

Board members continued to be responsible for writing the exam. The December 1930 assignments were as follows:

- Sister Domitilla – Anatomy and Physiology, Foods and Nutrition, Diet in Diseases
- Mrs. Hein – Ethics and History of Nursing, Hygiene and Sanitation
- Miss Newcombe – Bacteriology and Communicable Diseases, Principles of Nursing
- Miss Peterson – Surgery, Medicine, Neuro-Psychiatry, Materia Medica
- Miss Halverson – Obstetrics and Pediatrics

It was during this decade that several schools of nursing expressed interest in a five-year degree course for nursing students. The Board felt a study of facilities was necessary and applied for a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. On March 9, 1932, the "Secy. reported receipt of letter from the Rockefeller Foundation in response to request from this Board for monetary assistance, which request was refused. Motion by Mrs. Hein that a letter be written to the University School of Nursing and other hospitals and colleges interested in the Degree Course, notifying them of the refusal of the Rockefeller Foundation to help defray the expenses of the contemplated study of the educational facilities in their institutions; also to state that the expense, which is dependent upon the number of institutions participating and the length of time, needed for the study, will have to be shared by them, with the board; also to request a definite statement from these institutions as to whether they are willing to share the expense." The responses were indefinite, but history has shown that the concept was successful.

OTHER MATTERS

In January 1928 the salary of the Secretary of the Minnesota State Board of Examiners of Nurses was raised from \$150 per month to \$175.

At the end of 1930, 10,282 nurses had registered.

In 1931, having been invited by WCCO Radio to acquaint its listeners with the work of the Minnesota State Board of Examiners of Nurses, Secretary Leila Halverson gave the following talk:

"At the beginning of this century, the time was fully ripe to establish safeguards for the young and growing nursing profession, to protect sick and helpless people from the results of inferior and incompetent nursing and to establish a standard upon which qualified nurses would be known. This was as inevitable in nursing as it was in medicine. Charlatanism, so long rampant in medicine in the United States, receives its check through legislation. Nursing, following on years later, began to be subject to the same inroads, and the need for legislation was very evident."

To the relief of members of the Board, a bill, introduced by State Representative Leonard Eriksson of Fergus Falls, which proposed to grant licensure without examination, was defeated by the 1933 Legislature. Board members suspected him of doing a personal favor for someone.

On June 30, 1934 a total of 13,436 nurses had been registered.

Miss Daisy Dean Urch was appointed Education Director of Nursing on May 1, 1934. By the end of June, she had visited 10 hospitals and surveyed five schools.

Some expenses for the 1933-34 fiscal year were:

▪ Permanent salaries	\$4,337.75
▪ Temporary salaries	897.91
▪ Printing costs	170.42
▪ Telephones and telegraphs	54.51
▪ Water	2.00
▪ Mechanical equipment	50.80
▪ Publications	24.76

The event which most defined this decade, the Great Depression, resulted in salary reductions for the board. "Secy. stated having had two conferences with Mr. Pearlove, Comptroller...presenting books showing expenses and income covering period 1929 to present time relative to reductions in the salary budget of this Board, in compliance with law passed in the 1933 session of the legislature."

Budget reductions included:

- Board members - \$10.00 to \$8.00 per diem
- State Board exam papers – 40 cents to 30 or 32 cents per paper
- Secretary's salary – from \$225 to \$200 per month
- Elimination of stenographer position - \$65.00 per month

"The reductions herein prescribed are to be construed as an emergency provision, applicable only to the years ending June 30, 1934 and June 30, 1935."

And, indeed, the secretary's salary was restored to \$225.00 per month on July 1, 1935 and per diem was raised to \$9.00 on the same date.

At the end of 1935, there were 33 accredited schools of nursing, 14,770 registered nurses had been licensed and it was noted that enrollment in schools of nursing had dropped 29.6 percent in five years, from 3,290 students on January 1, 1930 to 2,317 on January 1, 1935. This may well be another result of the Depression, although there is not such attribution in the board's minutes of the decade.

In January 1936, the Board, in the interest of public health, took the lead in establishing interagency communication. "Board considered advisability of forming a special committee to confer with the State Board of Examiners of Nurses, with representation from the State Medical Association, the State Hospital Association, the State Department of Education, the State Board of Health and the State Board of Control, to discuss the problems which concern the various groups, and include care of the sick, the efficient economic management of hospitals, and the education of nurses and which, it hoped, will establish a fitting relationship between our groups. Final decision of the Board was to

establish such a committee and invite them for a dinner meeting at 6:30 p.m. on March 16th, at the Women's City Club, at which time a history of the State Board of Examiners of Nurses would be submitted, including activities and functions and its relationship to the various nursing organization and the official registries. There would be an opportunity for discussion of various problems."

On June 30, 1936 the number of schools of nursing had dropped 48.4 percent in 10 years from 64 to 33 and the number of students, 2,155, had dropped 7 percent from the previous year. Some thought that this was because standards had become too stringent; the Board did not agree. There is a great possibility that it is more likely a result of the Depression.

Along with its biennial budget request for 1937-38, the board submitted a list of its duties:

- to hold regular monthly meetings of the board to transact its business
- to arrange for and conduct state board examinations for nurses twice a year at St. Paul, Fergus Falls, Duluth and Rochester
- to prepare, mimeograph, examine and grade objective type examination papers, of approximately 900 to 1,000 applicants per year for state registration
- to issue state certificates of registration to successful candidates
- to determine eligibility of, and grant state registration to, applicants registered in other states or foreign countries
- to keep permanent and up-to-date records of all nurses registered in Minnesota and of all transactions of the board
- to survey schools of nursing through an educational director, to advise and make recommendations, and to accredit schools of nursing
- to prepare a state curriculum for schools of nursing
- through Secretary to give four to six lectures per year to students of Minnesota schools of nursing relative to registration and legislation
- to conduct correspondence and conferences with schools of nursing and hospital administrators, the State Board of Control, nursing organizations, medical and hospital associations, and Boards of Nurse Examiners of other states, regarding school of nursing problems, State Board examinations, failure in same, post-graduate courses, affiliations, transfers, registration, legislation and statistical information
- Secretary-Treasurer advises with bookkeeper the preparation of budgets and all financial affairs (receives fees added in hand writing)
- routine office work

While these narratives offer highlights of the growing maturity of the Minnesota State Board of Examiners of Nurses, it is impossible to record the Board's history without noting the dedication and energy of the women who were the first architects of the Board. Their leadership and willingness to devote countless hours built an amazingly strong foundation for guiding the nursing profession in Minnesota.